

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 000189

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [CASC PHUM IS KIRF ISRAELI SOCIETY](#)

SUBJECT: AMERICAN PASTOR ASSAULTED IN RELIGIOUS
PROTEST THAT TURNED VIOLENT

1. SUMMARY: Amcit Howard Mitchell Bass (25-Jan-1950 VA) told Conoff on January 4 that on December 24, 2005, he and his Messianic Christian congregation were physically assaulted by ultra-Orthodox Jewish protestors in Beer Sheva, who apparently believed and spread rumors that "busloads" of Jews were to be baptized that day. His reports have been corroborated by other sources. Bass claimed that this level of violence is rare. He said that most Messianic Christian congregations experience some form of harassment from time to time from groups like Yad L'Achim, but in general they are thankful for the degree of freedom they generally enjoy. End summary.

2. Howard Bass, who introduced himself as the pastor of Kehilat Nachalat Yeshua, a "Messianic Christian" congregation, said that he moved to Israel in 1982 and that his wife and three children are also American citizens. According to Bass, the majority of his 120 congregants are Israeli citizens, including around 25 American citizens who regularly attend services. Bass said that on the morning of December 24 two women were scheduled to be baptized. According to him, Yad L'Achim, to which he referred as an "anti-missionary" ultra-orthodox Jewish organization, heard about the planned baptisms and publicized on their website that "10 busloads of Jews" from all over the Negev Desert were to be baptized. Bass said that the Yad L'Achim website encouraged a vigorous response to the alleged mass baptisms, comparing it to the Jewish Macabbees' resistance against Greek religion in the second century B.C.

3. According to Bass, a handful of protestors came early to the service and were welcomed in with the understanding that they would not be disruptive. By 10 a.m., however, Bass continued, several hundred protestors had gathered outside and the police were called to ensure that the protest remained peaceful. The city's chief Sephardic rabbi, Bass claimed, oversaw the events and appeared to be the protestors' leader. As the crowd grew, Bass reported, the protestors broke into the church past the police line, and began to destroy the property of the church, overturning and throwing tables and chairs, breaking the overhead projector, spitting on congregants, and throwing objects into the baptismal pool. At this point, Bass claimed, he himself was assaulted, punched, slapped and ultimately thrown into the baptismal pool himself. Including his broken glasses and the broken overhead projector, he estimated damage to the building and to church property to be several thousand dollars.

4. Independent corroboration of the events includes a website with video clips (www.ha-makom.com), and the account of an official American, the Beer Sheva staff member of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who was present to attend services that day. This U.S. citizen told Conoff on January 4 that he supports what Bass' account, adding that he himself was spit upon numerous times and hit with a stone. He said that he also saw police vehicles being vandalized during the protest. This Amcit said that his wife's Bible was torn from her hands and thrown into the mud. He speculated that the majority of the crowd was there simply because their rabbis told them to be there, and that only a minority became violent. As to whether he believes that this type of violent protest was supported by Israeli society as a whole, he said that most Beer Sheva residents were disgusted with what happened, and that he subsequently received numerous calls from Israeli friends who expressed their outrage and sorrow over what happened. He also said that the police were very proactive in trying to protect the church and were firm with the crowd.

5. Another American citizen present at the scene, an engineer for Lockheed Martin, said in a January 1 email to the Regional Security Office that an angry mob surrounded his car, spitting on it, rocking it from side to side, tearing off a side mirror, and denting and scratching it. No media reports appeared about the event, save for one December 28 op-ed piece written by Bass himself, published by the Jerusalem Post. Bass asserted to Conoff that had a synagogue been invaded, and a rabbi assaulted by a mob, it would have been front-page news, and he charged thatt

the near-total media silence demonstrates that religious liberty for non-Jewish faiths in Israel is simply not a priority for the Israeli government. He claimed that no arrests were made at the scene despite the damage done to church property and the physical violence against him and other members of the church.

16. The Beer Sheva police spokesman confirmed to Conasst on January 4 that the incident occurred largely as described by Bass, but he said that four people were later arrested. While he would not say with which crimes they were charged, he said that an investigation into the incident is ongoing.

17. Bass claimed that while events like this do occur in Israel, this level of violence is rare. He said that most Messianic Christian congregations experience some form of harassment from time to time from groups like Yad L'Achim, but in general they are thankful for the degree of freedom they generally enjoy. He claimed that seven years ago, another rumor was circulated that his church was kidnapping Jewish children and baptizing them, and though a crowd of around 1,000 showed up to protest, it did not turn violent. He also claimed (in an event that has gained some press coverage) that a church in the Negev Desert city of Arad has been the object of regular demonstrations, and that the business of one of the congregants burned down under as-of-yet unexplained circumstances. He added that, in light of what he described as the inaction of the police, he is considering legal action, possibly against Yad L'Achim or the head Sephardic rabbi of Beer Sheva.

JONES